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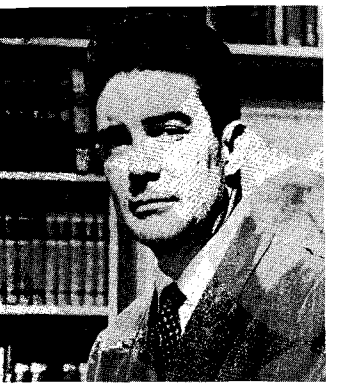

DAN SMOOT

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS VERSUS FREE SCHOOLS

John Dewey—father of progressive education—was primarily responsible for bringing socialist theory and revolution to American schools, supplanting traditional education, which had stressed hard work, honor, duty, self-reliance with Divine guidance, personal achievement, individualism.

In 1904, Dewey became head of Teachers College at Columbia University, where his ideas have molded the thinking of leading educationists ever since. After Dewey retired in 1930, his disciples carried on the drive for progressive education.

In 1935, New York City public schools began to adopt techniques and textbooks of Deweyism. By 1945, many (if not most) American public school systems had been converted, in whole or in part, to Dewey's progressivism.

For a generation, educationists who controlled many public schools scorned basic education and stressed life-adjustment at the expense of real learning, group-togetherness instead of academic discipline.

By 1950, many American parents realized that something was wrong. We had the costliest, most elaborate educational system in the history of civilization; yet, it was graduating young people who could not spell, write a correct sentence, work simple arithmetic, or read with understanding; who had not been disciplined in work habits; who were ignorant of the history and traditions of their own country.

But citizens who criticized the schools they were being taxed to support were roundly condemned by educational and political leaders. The decade of the 1950's was marked by many jarring controversies between parents dissatisfied with our public school system, and educationists who praised the system as the best on earth.

Then came Sputnik I—the Soviet Union's first earth-orbiting man-made satellite—in October, 1957. Fear swept over our country — fear that the Soviets were surpassing us in vital fields of

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scientific development. People who had been defending our educational system as the very best, cited the launching of Sputnik as proof that American education was lagging, that Soviet schools were training more and better scientists and engineers than American schools were. Not once did they admit that the educational system they were damning was the one they themselves had built, defended, extolled.

All previous controversies about school curricula, textbooks, federal aid to education, were buried under an avalanche of propaganda about the desperate need to improve American education with vast outlays of federal tax money, if our nation was to survive as a major power in the modern world.

Before becoming President, Eisenhower had said that all who advocate federal aid to education are guilty of extravagance with public money, of dishonesty, and of behavior "more dangerous to our form of government than any external threat that can possibly be arrayed against us." After becoming President, Eisenhower urged Congress to pass the National Defense Education Act as an "emergency program . . . . in the essential interest of national security." Congress passed the Act in 1958, the first really comprehensive federal-aid-to-education law. The general purpose of this law was to refurbish the American educational system—denounced as inadequate by the very people who had previously praised it in extravagant terms. The specific objective was to improve the teaching of science, mathematics, and foreign languages at all school levels.

Apparently, goals were to be reversed: Dewey's progressive education was to be abandoned; schools were to search out and encourage excellence, instead of limiting curricula to life-adjustment programs watered down to the lowest common denominator of the student masses.

The brightest students were segregated into accelerated classes, so that they would not be held back by the pace of less gifted youngsters. Standards for admission to college were generally raised.

Federal aid to education increased annually and sharply after 1958; but the government's objective seemed to change again. In May, 1962, the U.S. Office of Education published *Education For Freedom and World Understanding*. On page 23, the "Long Range Objective" of American education is stated:

"Our fundamental goal is a progressive nation in a peaceful world . . . . Achieving this objective demands understanding of and commitment to the proposition that education is a primary instrument for social advancement and human welfare."

What happened to individual initiative, scholastic excellence, academic discipline? What happened to the desperate need of 1957-58 for upgrading American education by improving the teaching of basic courses?

Kennedy expanded the federal role in education during 1963. Johnson vastly extended it in 1964, under pretext of fighting poverty.

With enactment of Johnson's Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965, the federal government had a hand in financing and controlling American educational institutions at all levels, from kindergarten through college. For the 1965-66 academic year alone, Congress authorized 7 billion dollars for federal spending on education.

What was the objective of school systems receiving such massive infusions of federal tax money, and how were they faring? As the 1965-66 academic year began, *U.S. News & World Report* (September 13, 1965) published an article surveying the situation:

"Youngsters flocking back to classes in record numbers—35.9 million in elementary schools and 12.9 million in high schools—are being plunged into all kinds of innovations . . . .

"A revolution in the schools that began about 10 years ago is now coming of age.

"It was in the mid-1950s that charges of lax standards in the schools became a big and growing issue.

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"Complaints mounted about high school graduates who couldn't read, about the emphasis of many educators on happiness and social adjustment rather than on learning, and about the lack of discipline in many schools.

"Out of these complaints sprang a drive to overhaul education—a drive that is still going on.

"In that process, new problems have arisen and some of the old ones have become aggravated . . . .

"Everywhere, there is agreement among educators that academic standards in the nation's schools have gone up rather sharply in recent years."

That 1965 survey indicates that educationists had returned to the goals announced for American schools as justification for the 1958 National Defense Education Act: raising academic standards and improving the quality of teaching. But one year later, goals had been reversed again. From *U. S. News & World Report*, September 5, 1966:

"As young Americans in record numbers—56 million all told—head back to school and college, this much is becoming clear: From nursery school through university, teaching is to be geared to the backward child this year more than ever before . . . .

"Losing out, somewhat, is the drive in recent years to stiffen U. S. academic standards and push the bright child ahead faster.

"New emphasis is being given to the schools as 'social instruments' that are to provide special advantages for the slow learner . . . .

"In Washington, D. C., the school board has ordered an end to the 'track system' which separates youngsters according to ability. In the nation's capital, as in other big cities, this system has been under fire from Negro leaders who complain that it 'segregates' most slum children into classes for slow learners."

What *is* the objective of public schools? This year it seems to be the opposite of what it was last year; last year, it seemed to be the opposite of what it was in 1962; in 1962, it seemed to be the opposite of what it was in 1958; in 1958, it seemed to be the opposite of what it had been since 1935.

Our children are being used as guinea pigs for social experimentation—as pawns in vicious political power plays. The end result will be the destruction of our civilization—debasement of high principles, elimination of cherished values, that made America the envy and hope of the world.

The truth is, what we call *free public schools*, are *costly government schools*, operated on the totalitarian principle of universal coercion. Administrators of government schools are answerable, not to parents, but to political authorities that dispense tax money.

Today, Washington's objective for government schools is racial integration. What will it be tomorrow? Forcible removal of children from parents who criticize the administration in power? Federally-prescribed uniforms for all children so that none will have traumas because others dress better? Medical treatment and scientific brainwashing to make all children look alike and behave alike so that none will feel inferior, different, deprived?

Mashing all children down to a low level of mediocrity, squeezing them into a common mold prescribed by agitators, sociologists, and politicians;

eradicating self-respecting individualism which keeps human beings civilized and law-abiding even when they are non-conformists who strive for personal distinction, superiority, excellence;

cultivating a crowd culture which makes human beings blind conformists in all things involving intellect and spirit, but renders them violent anarchists when seeking gratification of animal appetites, or acting as faceless factors in a mob—

these are goals toward which government schools are gravitating.

But there is little we can do about the peril, within the framework of the existing system.

Some parents want their children in racially integrated schools; others do not. Some parents want their children given religious instruction in school; others do not. Some parents approve of a school curriculum which concentrates on group-togetherness and life-adjustment but graduates

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ignoramuses, unexposed to academic disciplines; other parents would like their children drilled hard in the use of basic educactional tools — reading, writing, arithmetic — and would like them instructed in the history of their state and nation.

Atheists have managed to have God outlawed from public schools; but what *constructive* influence can parents exert? For the most part, the only allowable role of parents in a government school system is to furnish children and money.

What *can* we do? We can abolish government schools and build free schools — free of control by governmental authorities whose motivations are political, not educational.

By substituting private financing for federal aid and school taxes, we would eliminate government compulsion which is not only unjust and (as concerns the federal government) unconstitutional, but is also the source of our major educational problems.

Then, people with no children in school would not be forced to pay for educating other people's children. Parents with school-age children could patronize the kinds of schools they want. Those who want church schools could support church schools. Those who want non-sectarian private schools, or trade schools, or special-purpose schools, or schools of classic instruction, or segregated schools, or integrated schools — could do likewise.

We would thus reduce the cost of education by several billion dollars a year, and provide better education for children than they have had since compulsory tax-supported schools replaced private and parochial schools 100 years ago.

How about children whose parents could not pay tuition? The people of America voluntarily contribute enough money to maintain churches for millions of members; and they voluntarily support religious, educational, charitable, artistic, and scientific institutions all over the world. It is absurd to say they would not educate children of the poor without the force of law.

If the billions now confiscated in taxes for our extravagantly expensive government schools were left in the hands of the people, there would be enough money in every community to build and operate all necessary educational institutions.

We will solve our major educational problems when the people elect governors, state legislators, U. S. Congressmen, and a President who have the courage and good sense to say:

How dare a government, professing to be free, lay violent hands on children and force them to attend particular schools, study particular books, under particular teachers?

Whence does government derive the right to take charge of my children and say when, where, what, and by whom they shall be taught? Whence does government derive the right to seize another man's money for the education of my children?

How dare a government, professing to be free, invade the domain of private duty and private right that God assigned to parents?

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